

**Interview with Helen Lee Tyrrell**  
**Conducted by Linda Byrne for the**  
**Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

**July 2, 2014**

**Linda:** Today is July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014 and I am sitting in the home with Lee Tyrrell. Lee, tell me where did you grow up and a little bit about your early years.

**Lee:** Well in several places – here in Dunn Loring - I spent the first five years living with my aunt here in Dunn Loring. It was a wonderful time of my life. I grew up with horses, dogs, chickens, cows all of that which was a wonderful experience for me. My father's sister made it possible and I stayed with her until I had to go to school. And then I was restricted only to weekend visits. I went to school, elementary school in Arlington – Cherrydale to be exact. And I went to high school in Arlington – Washington and Lee High School.

My earlier years were just wonderful in that I just learned so much about where everything came from. I actually was able to milk a cow and did it every day. I was able to gather eggs; had my own little garden and I had garden tools and was able to help with the fruit and the vegetables which we canned and worked hard in our kitchens. And we ate some of the chickens so I knew how that happened, helped to clean them – it was a wonderful time. I felt like I was privileged.

**Linda:** What years would this have been that you were growing up out here?

**Lee:** Well ah, when I lived in Dunn Loring until I was six or seven and then I moved down to Cherrydale because I had to go to school. My parents insisted that I come back down and go to school in Arlington. But weekends were here in Dunn Loring with my father's sister, and her name was Hilda Garrison. And she and her husband lived in a beautiful home on thirteen acres there that were frontage on what is now Gallows Road.

**Linda:** Over near Electric Avenue?

**Lee:** Electric Avenue was at that time was a railroad and ah and our front yard really emptied out onto the tracks.

**Linda:** Oh my goodness.

**Lee:** And I could – the only person that I ever saw because we were off the road – and there was a Dr. Devitt who lived on the other side of the tracks and we could walk over to visit him. He had a school in Washington and it was called Devitt Prep. And it was a preparatory school for young men that were going to be going to the Naval Academy.

**Linda:** Interesting, interesting.

**Lee:** Yes, he was the only person that we visited because his house was close by. There were no other houses close to us.

**Linda:** At that time I read some about a Wedderburn area there where there little midget houses or miniature houses. Was that in that same general vicinity?

**Lee:** I am not familiar with that – I never saw them. I really didn't see much of anything except our land and one interesting thing – I mean we had well water and so we would go to the well every day and pump away and I don't recall miniature houses.

**Linda:** Um. Tell me a little more about your family you said your dad – we were talking earlier - was into racing or race horses?

**Lee:** He was definitely – we had race horses a lot of them. He was an owner, trainer and we spent a lot of time in barns and at race tracks and we had a wonderful life. Our house in Arlington was pretty well loaded with Jockey silks and boots and sometimes jockeys. Well my mother would cook massive breakfasts and they'd come down and eat one egg because they were, you know, trying to keep from gaining weight and

**Linda:** Yes.

**Lee:** it was wonderful. One of my father's jockeys was of some renown and he use to ride for my dad quite frequently. And so we got to know him and it was

good. We were at stables a lot – sometimes we traveled. Sometimes my dad took my sister and I with him and we traveled to – up and down the east coast but mostly to places like Ohio, Randal Park in Ohio. And I went to Florida when he had horses at Gulf Stream and other tracks he was at up and down the east coast. So it was a great time for us. I thought it was just the way everybody lived.

**Linda:** And what was his name.

**Lee:** Gault Davis, he was written up in the Washington Post quite frequently because of the horses that he owned. I have saved a lot of the sports sections and he also was a bowling professional and worked as the bowling professional in his later life at Chevy Chase Country Club. He owned a bowling facility in Roslyn when we were growing up, when I was in high school and prior to that also Arlington Hall and Fort Meyer, north Fort Meyer, south Fort Meyer. My dad was an entrepreneur and did very well at that.

**Linda:** Wonderful, great. Sounds like you had a terrific childhood.

**Lee:** Can't complain a bit.

**Linda:** So what year did you graduate from high school?

**Lee:** I graduated from Washington and Lee in 1951 and at that time we were at war with Korea and I went immediately as a summer help to the Pentagon. And I worked there and then became a permanent there. When I first got there we were all just temporary employees. And then later became permanent employees. So, my husband now – I met him when we were in high school- – He was at Falls Church high school and he went into the Marine Corps and was there during the Korean campaign. And after he came out then we were married. But we met when we were in high school.

**Linda:** So did you correspond while he was in the war?

**Lee:** Yes

**Linda:** I have an aunt that saved many letters that she received from her husband at that time.

**Lee:** I can imagine. My husband's uncle was in World War II and he was killed in the Battle of the Bulge. But he had just graduated from law school and he volunteered. And wanted to get it over with you know – figuring he would get drafted and so he volunteered. Went to England first, they sent them to England. My husband's family were from London and so he wrote many letters from London looking up all of the family there. And then went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge and he was shot unfortunately after the Germans had surrendered.

**Linda:** Oh, how sad.

**Lee:** Um hum.

**Linda:** Well this made me think you had also mentioned you have history back with the Civil War in your family.

**Lee:** Yes, I do, my father's mother was the daughter of Richard N. Roland; he was a sergeant in the 17<sup>th</sup> Virginia infantry. And they left from – he was in Mount Vernon guards – and they left from Alexandria and ah he went to fight for the confederacy. And he was wounded and he was also imprisoned. And he was in prison and escaped; probably one of the few people that escaped from Point Lookout Maryland. But he did escape in a barrel.

**Linda:** Oh my goodness.

**Lee:** They thought that these folks were bathing in the water and he just slipped away. I do have documentation of that. And he came home and then he was shot in one of the, I think, first battles of Manassas. And then went on – he was in the hospital in Richmond because he was recuperating from his wounds. And then he went back in again and he was captured again and ended up in Elmira, New York in prison there. Then he was with General Lee at the surrender. And came back home to Alexandria, married and had 5 children – one of which was my grandmother. So that's pretty much it.

**Linda:** That's wonderful to have that history.

**Lee:** Yes. And he's buried down in Old Town Alexandria along with his wife and my grandparents and my aunt, the one who lived here in Dunn Loring. They are all right there together in Bethel Cemetery in old town Alexandria.

**Linda:** Oh, is that the one right in town.

**Lee:** It's right, well yes, it's Gibbon Street.

**Linda:** I know exactly where it is.

**Lee:** You know where that is?

**Linda:** Yes, I do, I do.

**Lee:** You turn right and go in there and they are there.

**Linda:** Yes, it is lovely.

**Lee:** Just in a stone's throw of the street. We use to go there every Christmas morning, take wreaths for all of them. One of my father's must do things on Christmas morning. We did that every Christmas morning and then came home and had a big breakfast after that.

**Linda:** A nice tradition.

**Lee:** It was a good tradition.

**Linda:** Let's jump back to – you and your husband got married and tell me what happened next.

**Lee:** Well he owned, operated and owned a business in McLean for thirty some years. He owned a barber shop in Chesterbrook shopping center in McLean. He was the first person to move into that when they built the shopping center.

**Linda:** I bet I know a lot of people who frequented that barber shop.

**Lee:** You probably do. He was sort of known as the McLean psychologist if you will. Had lots and lots of wonderful clients. And still they are still around and

that's nice. One of his clients whom he thinks a lot of is Bill Page who owns Page Honda.

**Linda:** Automotive yes.

**Lee:** But Bill was just – I think he went to Ernie, my husband's name is Ernie from the time he was 7 years old.

**Linda:** Oh, my goodness.

**Lee:** So my husband now has Parkinson's so he is retired. And he's 83 now but he had that business for over 30 some years and sold it to the people that work for him. He has some wonderful memories as do I of some marvelous people that we also count as friends.

**Linda:** Right. So then you had children?

**Lee:** We have one son and he works for the government – is about to retire as a matter of fact. He went to George Mason University and graduated from there; and then went immediately to work for the government. Um, we have two grandchildren that live here and one that lives in Chicago. Our grandchildren are in their early twenties and ah, they are very busy young men. One is in college now and so we are very proud of them. One is an excellent swimmer and has done a lot of swimming for Virginia – set some records at Annandale High School and is a great back stroker.

**Linda:** Oh, what is his name?

**Lee:** His name is Kyle and we are very proud of him. And then we have another young man whose name is Zackery and he indeed works at Page Honda for Mr. Bill Page.

**Linda:** Oh that's nice. Um, talk about some of the changes you've seen happen here – maybe let's start with schools – when your son was going to school here and then your grandchildren and changes that you've seen.

**Lee:** Well my son went to Falls Church High School. He graduated from Falls Church High School and of course it was not, it's in a different place now than it

was when he went cause he went down in Falls Church. And now the school has moved out of that area. So, that's one change. Of course, when we build here and moved here in 1979 – we've been in this house for thirty some years – the traffic was sort of nonexistent here in Dunn Loring.

**Linda:** Laughing – I am sure.

**Lee:** And now with the addition of route 66 and the Dunn Loring metro station we have seen ah a lot of changes. A lot of traffic and certainly a lot more houses than when we moved into this area. We love it here – it's a beautiful place to live.

**Linda:** It is.

**Lee:** I, my husband and I helped start a church here in Dunn Loring; Holy Cross Episcopal Church on Gallows Road which came into being in 1979 when we moved here. I was there first administrator and I worked there for 13 years. That has been I guess the most wonderful thing in our lives here in Dunn Loring. We're very active – my husband not so much now because of his illness but he was very active when he could be. He was senior warden there for several years. We didn't have a church building, we did not have a building – we met in the Y, I guess YWCA here on Gallows Road for several years. The church was built in 1983 by Hitt Construction Company. And they were wonderful to us and enabled us to have a building in 90 days.

**Linda:** Oh my goodness that's extraordinary.

**Lee:** It is extraordinary it is.

**Linda:** You have a connection to the Hitt family.

**Lee:** The connection is that Mr. Hitt is my brother-in-law and I said please.

**Lee and Linda:** chuckling.

**Lee:** So in 90 days we had a building. We've added on since then so we've become such a great part of this community in that we have really great outreach programs to help people in this community that need the help. Um, it's really a wonderful thing. We cook for the homeless some Monday nights and take it to

Safe Haven. And we do a lot of food preparation and we do help an organization called CHO which helps people that have no homes. So we have homeless week in which they come and live with us for a week and we feed them and you know it's a wonderful experience.

**Linda:** Oh that's wonderful. How many people would you have?

**Lee:** Um, sometimes 30.

**Linda:** Wow, and they – at the church, they stay at the church?

**Lee:** Yes, they go out during the day but they come home and they have dinner and we give them breakfast as well. And then they sleep there – well we do that for a week each year just to help them out. Help the homeless out – it's a wonderful, wonderful.

**Linda:** Very rewarding I would imagine.

**Lee:** Yes, it is, very much so. We have great youth programs; we've grown a lot from the 30 people that started a little tiny church.

**Linda:** Wow, how large would your congregation be now?

**Lee:** That's a very good question. I would imagine that it's well over a thousand now.

**Linda:** Oh wow.

**Lee:** I would think yeah when you realize that since we started a lot of our folks had children who are now married and have children.

**Linda:** Right, right.

**Lee:** It's been a wonderful, wonderful experience.

**Linda:** Well, you've seen a lot of growth around here – talk a little bit about Merrifield and Dunn Loring and how they have grown and changes.



**Lee:** Oh, it's really been mind boggling to realize what has happened here. I mean I do recall when we had on Gallows Road a field of horses; and that hasn't been that long ago. And then you know when industry started moving in and people started to put businesses in there when it had just been a field. In fact my own brother-in-law has built a business there. And now it's apartments. It's just a metro station and that has brought in so, so many people, so many condos and apartments and hotels. It's really hard to realize sometimes that less than 20 years ago a lot of this wasn't here.

**Linda:** Um hum and sitting here in your house I can imagine it wouldn't be here also because you have lovely big trees and it's very quiet and peaceful here.

**Lee:** It is quiet which is one of the reasons we built here; now it's not as quiet as it used to be. We, my husband and I sat on the street and when we bought this property and there were no cars going by so we thought – ah this is great. Now we have a lot of cars that go up our street because of 66 - that is an addition too that has caused a great influx of more traffic.

**Linda:** Right.

**Lee:** And Tysons Corner; we're not far from Tysons Corner which now just getting bigger and bigger. When I first saw Tysons Corner I was a child and there was nothing there – absolutely nothing – one building at Tysons corner and that was it. We had nothing else, just rolling countryside so yes I have seen a lot of changes.

**Linda:** Now would you say they are good – how would you describe them.

**Lee:** You know that's a matter of opinion because I think it's done a lot of wonderful things for people – for me I love the country so it's kind of bitter sweet for me. With the one wonderful thing in our live which of course is our church. And that is there and so it makes it palatable.

**Linda:** Would you have any advice to people that might be considering moving to this area?

**Lee:** Well yes, I think it's a wonderful place to live. I think Dunn Loring is particularly great because of our way that people live – neighbors are very important and we do have that kind of surrounding around us. People that have lived here for a long time still live here. A lot of the houses are not new houses they are older houses and people have lived here all their lives and had their children here and their children are still here. It's a wonderful place because of the community atmosphere – if you will. It's a wonderful thing – it's easy for me to say because I have a very large family and they're all here. My sister lives here, my brother lives here and my sister has 15 grandchildren and they're all in and around here – and so it's very easy for us to be here because you know we have that connection which is a wonderful thing – I think for people.

**Linda:** Um hum.

**Lee:** If they come here they don't generally want to leave and that's the good part.

**Linda:** Wonderful.

**Lee:** Yeah wonderful.

**Linda:** Well, I thank you very much for this interview.

**Lee:** Well you're very welcome.

**Linda:** Do you have any other information that you'd like to share?

**Lee:** No, I'll probably think of that in an hour.

**Linda:** Well we can always meet again.

**Linda:** Thank you so much.

**Lee:** It's my pleasure

**[Recording paused]**

**Linda:** I'm back again with Lee Tyrrell and she is going to tell us a little about an organization called WORD.

**Lee:** Project Word.

**Linda:** Project Word.

**Lee:** Project Word was an organization that was founded by Martha Glennan who was a wonderful lady who was a paraplegic - when I first met Martha – she had been a Fairfax County School teacher and she had a disease called ankylosing spondylitis and was unable to walk. And so she organized Project Word which is working and organizing the resources for people with disabilities.

**Linda:** About what time frame would this have been – what year do you think.

**Lee:** It was during the 80's.

**Linda:** Um hum.

**Lee:** And ah the organization was housed in the Episcopal Church of the Holy Cross here in Dunn Loring. And I happened to be in the right place at the right time to be a part of this wonderful volunteer service which helped people with disabilities. Martha was in a wheelchair, could not walk at all - later became a quad but then that was helped by a wonderful surgeon. But this organization helped people when they came out of the hospital and they had needs. And a gentleman who was on our board – talented in computer sciences wrote up a program which enabled patients coming out of a hospital or just patients that had disabilities – they would call us and we could put them in touch with their needs. It was a wonderful, wonderful thing. For example if a person could not afford crutches or anything – food – whatever – we could put them in touch with the people that could help them. And sometimes we followed up on that as well.

**Linda:** So this was a volunteer organization?

**Lee:** Yes.

**Linda:** Did you need funding?

**Lee:** Yes and you know we got funding wherever we could get it. Yes.

**Linda:** Um hum.

**Lee:** And we did have some people that were paid because we had to have somebody there all day every day. But the majority of the people were volunteers and we were able to eventually – well I was connected for 13 years with this wonderful organization. We held workshops for volunteers helping them to help others. We did a lot of things we even went to the Cathedral which at that time had no handicapped entrance.

**Linda:** The Washington Cathedral?

**Lee:** It did not.

**Linda:** Oh my goodness.

**Lee:** In those days did not and Martha sat outside in her wheelchair – and then they did have it. So it was wonderful. Martha was on the board to Virginia, she went to Richmond cause she was a real great volunteer person who just wanted to see people that had disabilities – she wanted them to be helped. She knew what it was to need. And it was great, we eventually – Martha died, oh maybe 5 or 6 years ago and we were able to transfer the program that had been developed by Mr. Tom Coat – computer program – and we gave it to Fairfax County schools.

**Linda:** Oh, that's great.

**Lee:** So, I don't know whether they are still using it but we were able to help some children which is really important. So that was probably one of the greatest organizations that I was privileged to be a part of.

**Linda:** Well thank you for telling us about it.

**Lee:** Your welcome. I tell you that was amazing – oh my lord – um, um, um.

**[Recording paused]**

**Linda:** I'm here again with Lee.

**Lee:** Hello (giggling).

**Linda:** Hello Lee, and you were going to tell me about your work experience.

**Lee:** Well I worked in the Pentagon for the National Guard Bureau and it was a wonderful experience for me in that I worked for a gentleman who eventually became to be known as Mr. National Guard. His name was Mr. Thomas A. Hill, and he eventually became so well known in the National Guard. And it was my great privilege to work for him and he became such a wonderful friend that I even baby sat their children. So I can say it was a great time in my life. Thank you.

**Linda:** Awl thanks.